

Meeting to explore tax cap potential

◆ **Jan. 29 in Claremont:** The goal is to collect input, with an eye toward putting a formalized proposal before voters.

By **KRISTEN SENZ**
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CLAREMONT — Are funding cuts at the state level becoming an unfair burden on taxpayers? Should county governments be in the business of running nursing homes? Do citizens deserve some degree of predictability with regard to their tax bills?

Claremont City Manager Guy Santagate hopes to raise these

questions and others with local, county and state elected officials at an informational meeting about a proposed 2.5 percent spending cap. The meeting is set for Thursday, Jan. 29.

Santagate, at a recent city council meeting, proposed a legally binding tax cap that would forbid the Claremont City Council, the Claremont School Committee, the Sullivan County Commissioners and the Sullivan

County delegation from increasing spending more than 2.5 percent over the previous year in their respective operating budgets.

If the city, the school board and county government approved the cap, Claremont taxpayers could find some relief and reliability when they open up their tax bills twice a year, Santagate said.

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GUY SANTAGATE
Claremont city manager

he said. "My idea would be to zero in on the net amount that is raised by taxation from Claremont residents."

But county government, which pays for the county nurs-

ing home, the jail and other services, could run into problems with a spending cap because its revenue streams and many of its expenses are largely controlled

► See **Cap**, Page B2

Page 1 of 2

by the state, Sullivan County manager Greg Chanis said.

"We look forward to discussing how realistic it is for the county, based on the constraints we have," he said.

Santagate said the degree to which county officials' hands are tied when it comes to budgeting is one problem in a flawed relationship between the counties and the state. A discussion about capping spending could help bring those problems to the surface, he said.

"If there's pus underneath that scab, it's going to stay there unless you bubble it up," he said.

Claremont City Councilor Jeff Goff has said he's in favor of at least putting the spending cap proposal on the table for discussion, and he also wants to discuss the viability of the county nursing home in the fu-

ture.

"If it's a business that doesn't make sense, and it's costing us more and more money, this (tax cap proposal) would force people to make some hard decisions," Goff said.

Santagate said the goal of the upcoming informational meeting is to collect input on the spending cap proposal from elected officials and Claremont taxpayers, with an eye toward putting a formalized proposal on the ballot for voters.

The city council, school board, county commission, county delegation and Sen. Bob Odell, R-Lempster, have been invited.

The meeting will take place at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 29, in the Goodrich Room at the Sugar River Valley Regional Technical Center, 111 South St., Claremont.

Page 2 of 2